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This debate is not about talking points or messaging or even other countries. Countries such as Canada and Britain have government-run healthcare and each has their unique set of good and bad aspects to the system. But, what we need to focus on is the people in our country. In our system today, insurance companies make the decisions and decide for people if they can get the procedure they need, or if they are disqualified because the treatment is too expensive. We can do better than that in America.

Patients and their doctors make the best decisions for a patient's health and wellbeing.

Every Senator in this Chamber can agree: Our health care reform efforts should be patient-centered.

I hope my colleagues on the other side of the aisle will work with Democrats to ensure a strong health care package for the American people.

Mr. President, I see two of my colleagues are on the floor. I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New York.

Mr. SCHUMER. First, Mr. President, I wish to thank my colleague and friend from Illinois for his outstanding words once again on health care, and on the fact that we need some kind of check on the insurance companies. Our colleagues offer none. They just point to Canada and England, as he mentioned, which is a totally different system than we are focusing on.

Second, I wish to thank my colleague from Oregon, who is doing a great job in his first year in the Senate, for his generosity so I could speak for a brief moment and share with my colleagues some words about an act of bravery that occurred in my State yesterday.

TRIBUTE TO KEN MITCHELL

Mr. SCHUMER. Mr. President, as the Senate right now debates some of the biggest national issues of our time, it is important to sometimes take a step back and look to some of the great acts that are happening every day in our towns, cities, and States. So I wish to call attention to an act of personal heroism—and that is the appropriate word; this man is a true hero—that took place in my home State of New York.

Yesterday morning, at the South Orangetown Middle School in Blauvelt, NY—a town in Rockland County about 45 minutes from New York City—a disgruntled man with a gun stormed into the office of the school superintendent. He grabbed the superintendent, Ken Mitchell, by the necktie and started threatening him and making demands. At least three gunshots were fired.

This is the kind of situation that would have scared most everyone. But,

as we have learned now, Ken Mitchell is no ordinary person.

With his safety and the safety of his students on the line, he showed remarkable courage and wrestled the gunman down to the ground. He was able to grab the gun, kick it out of the way, and get the gunman pinned on the ground.

Usually when a SWAT team arrives at the scene of a crime, they are the ones to do the serious crime fighting. But this time, by the time they got there, they walked in on the school superintendent, who had already disarmed and pinned to the ground the dangerous criminal. To top it all off, Superintendent Mitchell even recognized one of the SWAT team members he had once coached as a kid on the local hockey team.

According to people on the scene, Mr. Mitchell was ready to get back to his office. As his brother-in-law said: "his tie wasn't even messed up"—just another day on the job for another great New Yorker.

It should be no secret to anyone that this incident could very quickly have turned into something unspeakable. While the headlines today are ones of praise, they could have easily been ones of grief. And praise God they were not.

But as one of New York's Senators, I want to rise publicly and congratulate Ken Mitchell for his act of bravery and heroism. As a parent myself, I know what it is like to send kids off to school in the morning and hope and pray they will come back home safely.

It is people such as Ken Mitchell who make it easy for parents to know their kids are in good hands when they wave goodbye on the schoolbus and send Johnny or Jill off to school.

Ken Mitchell is a reminder that every minute of every day Americans are engaging in personal, quiet acts of heroism and bravery about which we should all be grateful. I am proud he is from my State. And I am proud that, if even for one moment, I can give him some of the recognition he deserves.

I am sure Superintendent Mitchell is back at work right now as if nothing happened. However, Superintendent Ken Mitchell, on behalf of all New Yorkers, all Americans, and parents everywhere, we say thank you. It is Americans like you that make us proud.

Mr. President, I yield the floor and once again thank my colleague from Oregon for yielding.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Oregon.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. MERKLEY. Mr. President, in the coming weeks we are going to be taking up what is probably one of the most vexing policy challenges of the last 50 years: how to reform our health care system and provide affordable, accessible health care to every single American. The goal could not be more

straightforward: to guarantee access for every American—and the stakes could not be higher.

Our small businesses are collapsing under the weight of health insurance premiums. Last month, Oregon's largest insurer announced that the small business premium was going up 14.7 percent. That is on top of a 26-percent increase the previous year.

Large employers have the challenge as well. In a global economy, our broken health care system is a major competitive disadvantage. A greater share of the price of each car in the United States goes to health care than goes to steel. Mr. President, \$1,500 of the cost of a car goes to health care, while across the border in Canada that price is zero. If we are going to compete in the world, we need a competitive, cost-effective health care system.

Of course, the biggest impact of our expensive, ineffective health care is most acutely felt around the kitchen table by our working families. With unemployment skyrocketing, virtually every family is reminded of how tenuous its connection is to health care—just one pink slip away from losing health care for their family.

Even those with insurance find health costs out of reach. Nearly half of the personal bankruptcies are by folks who have health insurance but who still could not manage all the health care costs because of when they became ill.

So this is what it boils down to: Working families in America, if they have health care, are concerned about the copays, they are concerned about being underinsured, and they are concerned about losing their insurance with the loss of a job. Those working families without health care are worried about getting sick and how they are going to get well if they are already sick.

This does not have to be the case. Health care is already devouring a large portion of our economy—18 percent of our gross domestic product—driving long-term Federal deficits and crowding out important State investments in education, in infrastructure, in social services, and pretty much everything else, and it is only projected to get worse as our population ages and health care inflation runs rampant year after year.

Put simply, if we do not reform our health care system, our economy will not thrive. That is a stark choice. Our economy and health care are tied together.

I know none of this is news to the Presiding Officer or to any Members of this esteemed Chamber. In fact, since President Truman, 60 years ago, called for health care for every working American as a national priority, we have been struggling to achieve that goal, and we have not yet gotten there. We have been periodically trying to fix up a fragmented, expensive, unfair system. But the fear of change has always overtaken the sense of possibility.